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tribute on the first anniversary of his
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Lal Jayawardena (1934 – 2004) – A Tribute on the First Anniversary of his Death¹

Lal Jayawardena, who died in Colombo in April 2004, was an intellectual, a lover of life and a humane and gifted leader. He was a top Sri Lankan civil servant of the post-independence era and an influential policy maker. Lal was educated in Sri Lanka and at King's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with a double first in the Economics Tripos. He later did research for the PhD degree, also in Cambridge. He not only excelled academically, but was by all accounts a popular figure among his contemporaries, who included Amartya Sen, Richard Layard, Tam Dalyell, Mahbub ul Haque, Jagdish Bhagwati, Manmohan Singh and Geoff Harcourt. He was an "apostle" (a member of the famous, select club of undergraduates and dons). He is well remembered by his teachers, particularly Robin Marris and Ken Berrill. He also remained close to one of his Cambridge mentors, the late Nicolas Kaldor, with whom he shared an abiding interest in economic policy making. Lal's contributions were recognised by his college which bestowed on him an Honorary Fellowship.

He was his country's ambassador to the European Community and to Belgium and the Netherlands between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, and High Commissioner to the UK in 1999 and 2000. In between, he had been the principal economic advisor to the President of Sri Lanka and Deputy Chairman of the National Development Council. Indeed, at one time or another, Dr. Jayawardena held almost all the top economic posts in Sri Lanka, having become Treasury Secretary at the very young age of forty-one. He also had spells as an international civil servant. In that and in related capacities he was a serious contributor to the concept of the Third World and helped create collective organisations to realise the poor countries' demands for a more just international economic order, such as the Group of 77 at the United Nations and the Group of 24 at the IMF. He served for many years as either Deputy Chairman or Chairman of the latter group.

¹ Several people have helped me with the preparation of this article. I am particularly grateful to Andria Cornia, Vincent Massaro and Amartya Sen for many helpful discussions. However, I alone am responsible for the views expressed and for any errors made.

Lal Jayawardena was typical of his generation of senior civil servants in many (alas, not all) developing countries: they normally came from the upper crust of their nations but were deeply committed to equity; they were thoroughly professional, proud of their countries, but were very conscious of the backwardness of their economies. Their forebears may have learnt the art of sound civil service from their colonial masters, but Lal and his peers from other developing countries were critical of colonialism. They had the self-confidence to believe that they could carry out the tasks of reducing poverty and promoting economic development much better than the colonial governments had done. Over the last 40 years, these diplomats and policy makers have been deeply involved in fighting for a global regime which would provide space for developing countries in the world economy. As a young economist at UNCTAD, Lal was an early and extremely active member of Sydney Dell's study group on the international financial system, that for the first time paid attention to the views and interests of developing countries, as well as the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia. Lal and his colleagues wrote papers which undertook rigorous analyses from a Third World perspective on international economic issues. Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Indian Prime minister, at the Memorial meeting for Lal in New Delhi in April 2005, who was Lal's contemporary at UNCTAD at the time, recalled with pleasure the important work of this group in relation to the establishment of Special Drawing Rights at the IMF. Dr Singh also referred to the setting up of the aid target for advanced countries at 0.7% of GDP. Why 0.7%? The answer, which is buried in the deliberations of this group is that 0.7% was regarded as being a target for public aid and 0.3% represented private investment (which was the then current level of such investments), giving a total of 1%.

Later, this experience led Lal to become an 'eminent advisor' to the Brandt Commission and a member of his country's delegation to periodic conferences of UNCTAD. Although the credit for creating the entity of the Third World usually goes to the political leaders of the time - Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno, Tito and others - its real architects were dedicated professionals like Lal Jayawardena, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Dr. Mahbub ul Haque of Pakistan, the legendary Raul Prebisch from Argentina, Dr. Ken Dadzie from Ghana, Gamani Corea, also from Sri Lanka, as well as many others from around the developing world.

In the 1980s, Lal was appointed as the first Director of the UN University's World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER) in Helsinki. He was outstandingly successful as Director, helping build within a few years a world-renowned policy think-tank focussed on the development of poor countries. Under Lal's sometimes unorthodox leadership WIDER gained rapidly in reputation and compared favourably with scholarly institutions in both international organizations and the academic world. He did this with his unique mixture of intuition, dedication, flair and professional competence. These qualities brought him into conflict with some of his Finnish hosts in certain quarters, but to this observer it was rather a clash of managerial styles than anything more: Lal's culture of Asian management which sought to be judged on its results rather than the process versus the Nordic stress on the primacy of the process. Under Lal, WIDER represented serious independent and high quality research. It attracted well-known and busy scholars, including several existing and prospective Nobel Prize winners, as well as top policy makers from both rich and poor countries. During Lal's tenure as Director, UNU-WIDER published thirty two books in the series WIDER Studies in Development Economics, with another twenty four in the pipeline. All of these books have the cast-iron seal of high standards as they have been published by Clarendon Press at Oxford University Press (OUP). Most OUP books do not require acceptance by the University's academic delegates; however, the subset of books published by Clarendon Press do.

Lal was very much a hands-on Director in terms of organising the research agenda and was a fully engaged academic participant in the research program. As an economist, Lal continued to work in the international Keynesian tradition and a part of WIDER's research program was concerned with the renewal and revitalization of this school of thought so as to be of greater relevance to the policy needs of developing countries. This is evident from Lal's own publications, as well as from the invariably thoughtful prefaces he wrote to the many books coming out of WIDER. His own research, as would be expected, was very much concerned with policy issues and specifically, the problems of imbalances and asymmetries (both monetary and real) in the international economy. His policy proposals for using the Japanese surpluses in the 1980s for resolving the third world debt problem and for advancing economic development (see for example, the WIDER study group series No.1 of which Lal was the co-author) were widely acclaimed in the developing countries policy circles but of course did not

win him many friends in the newly converted neo-liberal citadels of the Bretton-Wood institutions. His WIDER Research for Action Series contribution on financing sustainable development provided the basis for the proposal presented by the UNCD Secretariat to the Rio Earth Summit. Lal also sponsored research at WIDER on Indo-Sri Lanka economic cooperation and in 1993 co-authored an analysis of the issues and policy proposals for enhancing such cooperation, including a reciprocal preference scheme for promoting trade between the two countries. This scheme was accepted by the two governments and came into effect at the end of 1998 with the signing of the relevant agreements by the Prime Ministers of India and Sri Lanka².

To sum up, Lal's close friend, the Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Sen, has aptly described him as having the "rare ability to be energetically sensitive to the predicament of people everywhere in the world" and someone who was "deeply sympathetic to radical changes and wanted to build a society that would be foundationally more just". In Lal's death the world has lost an extraordinary human being.

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² Dr. Jayawardena's own publications during his period at WIDER are given in the appendix

Appendix

Listed below are Dr. Jayawardena's publications during his tenure as Director of WIDER. Much of his writing during his career was done either for the Sri Lankan government or the international organisations he was working with. For example he served on groups which advised the UN Secretary General on the Re-structuring of the United Nations system(1975) and on the Re-structuring of Regional Training and Research Institutions in Asia(1978). He also contributed extensively to the work of several important commonwealth study groups including Reforming the Bretton Woods System(1983) and on the International Debt Crisis and the World Economy(1984)

1. "Partnership in Additionality: Contracts for Accelerated and Sustainable Development – 1991" – WIDER Research Action Series.
2. World Economic and Financial Crisis – November 1989 – WIDER Research for action Series.
3. A Global Environmental Compact for Sustainable Development Resource Requirements and Mechanisms, August 1991 – WIDER Research For Action Series.
4. The potential of the Japanese Surplus for Economic Development . - April 1986 – WIDER Study Group Series NO. 1 (Co-author)
5. Mobilizing International Surpluses for world Development – A WIDER Plan for Japanese Initiative - May 1987 – WIDER Study Group Series No. 1 (Co-author).
6. Debt Reduction, May 1988 – WIDER Study Group Series No. 3 (Co-author).
7. World Economic Summits: The Role of Representative Groups in the Governance of the World Economy, May 1989 – WIDER Study Group Series No. 4 (Co-author).
8. Foreign Portfolio Investment in Emerging Equity Markets March 1990 – WIDER Study Group Series NO. 5 (Co-author).
9. Private Investment in Infrastructure – The Mobilization of Equity Capital, January 1992 – WIDER – Study Group Series NO. 6 (Co-author).
10. The Environment and Emerging Development issues. 1992 – WIDER Study Group Series No. 7 (Co-author).
11. Indo-Sri Lanka Economic Cooperation – UNU/WIDER Study Group Series No. 9 – 1993 (Co-author)
12. "Developing Country Cooperation in International Financial Institutions" in G.K., Helleiner (ed). The International Monetary & Financial System: Developing Country Perspectives (MacMilan Press) London 1996.

Dr. Jayawardena's Ph.D Dissertation was on the subject "The supply of Sinhalese Labour to Ceylon Plantations (1830-1930): A Study of Imperial Policy in a Peasant Society" – (Cambridge University 1963). The dissertation was awarded the coveted Ellen McArthur Prize at Cambridge University. It has, however, not been published.